



Urban from Rural

This is the first main post of our series on Development, which is to run over ten weeks in the second quarter of 2016.

By serialising the material in this way, we are able to synchronise our reading, the better to assist dialogue around these texts. These postings are also arranged to conveniently serve a pre-planned schedule of weekly study-circle discussions. PDF reading texts will be attached, formatted (as a rule) for printing as booklets (A4 folding to A5). All the CU courses, including this one, are available for download via the link that is given below. That link will continue to be given at the bottom of each post.

To begin this course, we note that:

- The National Democratic Revolution (NDR) is a class alliance. It is a unity-in-action for the extension of democracy to the outer limits of the nation and to all conceivable mass constituencies. It is the pre-requisite for further political progress thereafter.
 - [Kwame Nkrumah](#) wrote: *“Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else shall be added unto you”*.
 - The substance of people’s political concerns is of a material kind; but development is human.
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Engels

With these preliminaries in mind we begin our series on Development with the first of two instalments touching on the work of [Frederick Engels](#).

The main one, attached today, is from Engels’ own book [“Condition of the Working Class in England”](#)

The next instalment in this part will be an article from a critic of Engels’: Mike Davis. To continue the course, these two will be followed by some modern writings on urban/rural problems. Then we will go to some of Lenin’s writings, including some from the period of the New Economic Policy or “NEP”, adopted after the Russian Bolshevik Revolution.

After that, the series will proceed to the question of Industrial Development and of large-scale national planning.

It would be hard to exaggerate the historical importance of Engels' work on "the condition of the English working class". It is the founding work of town-planning, yet it was written by an office clerk in his twenties who had no university education. Chance had taken him to Manchester, a place so far ahead of its time in those days that the phrase "*Manchester Capitalism*" was coined to describe its uniqueness, as well as its universal significance.

The CU suggests that comrades page through the attached chapter, although it is long, and read as much of it as is comfortable for them.

Not only did Engels objectify the great industrial towns in literature, systematically, and for the first time; but also, his work laid the empirical and experiential basis, before Engels had fully teamed up with Karl Marx in September 1844, of the conception of the working class as the gravedigger of capitalism and as the leading class in all of humanity and in all of human history. This was at a time when the proletariat was in the most miserable circumstances, as Engels describes. Yet he saw the historic position that they occupied, and their consequent revolutionary potential.

The "Industrial Revolution"

For context: It is said that in terms of the technology applied in the daily life of the masses, the condition of Western

Europe by the middle of the Eighteenth Century (i.e. the 1700s) had hardly reached the level of the far more urban Roman Empire that had fallen more than 1200 years earlier, after which Europe sunk into rural-based feudalism, a condition which survived in some parts right up to the 20th century.

The first three centuries of bourgeois power in Britain had been taken up with cruel overseas adventures. Among them were the Atlantic slave trade, the slave plantations, the competitive trade in the commodities produced there, and the resulting wars. In this period the banking, insurance, shipping and financial services, that were later to serve capitalism, became highly developed.

The Industrial Revolution of the late Eighteenth Century marked the turn away from slavery and towards capitalist wage-slavery, coinciding with the development of the coal-fired steam power that allowed factories (“mills”) to escape from remote sources of water power and to coagulate in urban density.

Manchester

Manchester was the first of these great industrial cities. Engels arrived there from Germany at the age of 19 in 1839, when Manchester was reaching an urban-industrial maturity that was unique in the world. And Engels saw it for what it was.

Johannesburg was established in Engels' lifetime, not so very many years after he wrote his description of the then-new "Great Towns" of Britain. Like Manchester, Johannesburg had its productive districts, its more polite commercial, commodity and financial markets, its separate dormitory slums for workers, and its nice suburbs for the bourgeoisie and their hangers-on. Johannesburg is close to the Manchester model.

There are people still alive in Johannesburg today whose grandparents were among the city's founding inhabitants. It is not difficult to comprehend that only a few generations separate us from the time when overall social conditions had not yet surpassed those of Ancient Rome.

It is not too much to claim, in relation to this work of Engels, that this is where the concept of modernity begins. In this literature, modern urbanism takes shape as an idea.

The picture above is of McConnel & Company's Mills, Manchester, in about 1820, the year of Frederick Engels' birth, and also the year of the arrival of the "1820 Settlers" in the Eastern Cape.

- The above serves to introduce the original reading-text - [Engels' 1845 "Condition of the Working Class in England", Chapter 2, The Great Town](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).